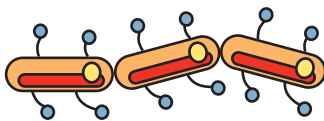


The worst virus that can get onto our network is the one not discovered.



The changing faces of viruses & hackers



By Staff Sgt. Nicholas Martychenko
28th Communications Squadron

ELLSWORTH AFB, S.D. —There were hackers and viruses back when the Internet was but a fledgling collection of Tandys, Macs, prehistoric IBMs, and text-based bulletin board sites. They were just there in different forms and using different methods.

Back then there were no firewall programs, proxy servers or antivirus software. All you had between you and them was your password and logon. And, if anyone got your SYSAD password, God help you.

Hackers could get unlimited capabilities over your BBS and anything you had on it. At that time, hacking was just a matter of patience and knowing your enemy. Hacking was viewed as a harmless prank on a friend and could be done using names or birthdates. It seems simple, right? Indeed, it was all too simple.

The face of the virus has changed as well. **It used to be that viruses could not be self-activating. They had to be activated from the computer itself after being uploaded to memory.** The viruses were not complex; they were incredibly simple, yet destructive. A simple command to format the hard drive imbedded in the program, sometimes elaborately hidden in a text-based game that the user would download to their computer and then play. When they completed the "game," they were rewarded with the one thing no computer user ever wants to see: the involuntary formatting of their primary hard drive.

While this may all seem harmless and rudimentary now, it was but a foreshadowing of what was to come. We now

live in a time when many of our most valuable assets exist only in the space between two computer chips. Many facets of our lives have been boiled down to a string of 1s and 0s. It's unsettling to think that by changing just one of those digits, our lives could be forever altered, rarely to the good.

Computer security, information security and network protection are practices that need to be ingrained in everyone as second nature. **Much like keeping your checkbook in a secure place, passwords must be protected. Memorization is the only true protection we have left.**

Viruses have evolved quickly in the past two decades. No longer are they passive programs, waiting for user activation. They invade, they replicate, they destroy and they do it with an efficiency that we can hardly counter.

Antivirus software is one of the tools that we have that allow us to stem the tide of destruction and chaos that viruses represent.

But much like a tetanus inoculation, it only works if you are still conscientious and aware of what is going on. The shot helps, but stepping on a rusty nail only gains you the need for another booster. Viruses are like that, so keep your antivirus software up to date with the most recent signatures and scan your computer monthly.

It's paramount that all network users, whether they are logged on to a DoD system or their own home computers, maintain a level of awareness that will allow for systemic degradation recognition and reporting.

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Know your enemy, know their weaknesses, and learn how to exploit them.

A hacker's weakness is tight security and educated end-users.

A virus' weakness is an up-to-date virus signature and software that recognizes viral patterns of destruction.



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